

COSEM-UA.0120
Utopia and Apocalypse
Fall 2011

TR 11-12:15
University Hall CO2A
110 E. 14th Street
Office Hours:
Wednesday 2-3
Thursday 1-2
Or by appointment

Prof. Eliot Borenstein
Russian & Slavic Studies
19 University Place, Room 210

998-8676 (w)

eb7@nyu.edu

By its very nature, utopianism is aggressively interdisciplinary: the search for a perfect world has resulted in a prose genre that straddles the boundary between fiction and philosophy, while the potential applications of utopian theory to political practice is the stuff of sociology, political theory, and experiments in “intentional communities.” Utopianism rather quickly spawned its skeptical counterpart, anti-utopianism (an argument with utopia), as well as a specific anti-utopian genre that has become a cliché of science fiction and film: dystopia (utopia gone wrong).

In this course, we will examine the development of the utopian tradition, primarily (though not exclusively) as a literary genre and philosophical thought experiment. Though defining the features of the genre will be an important component of our task, we will also examine the larger questions raised by utopian fiction: what is the impulse behind utopian literature? What is the relationship between utopia and the novel? How does time pass in utopias? How do we get from “here” (the imperfect world) to “there” (the perfect one), and how is this journey enacted in fiction? Why are the family, sexuality, and the role of women so central to the utopian tradition? How does utopian fiction at times inspire the reader to action, resulting in attempts to put fictional/philosophical models to the test (in communes, intentional communities, etc.)? What is the utopian conception of pleasure? Is there any place for the frivolous or the playful?

As we trace the development of utopian thought, we will find that it quickly became wedded to a teleological or eschatological view of history: utopia is seen as the culmination of historical progress, the goal toward which humanity has been striving. In Christian Europe, utopia becomes conflated with the kingdom of heaven to be established after the end of the world. Later utopian (and anti-utopian) fictions often place their “perfect” societies in a post-apocalyptic framework. The apocalypse adds particular moral and temporal dimensions to utopia: not only does utopia become the endpoint of history, a realm that exists almost outside of time, but the perfection of the coming world can be invoked to justify the cataclysm that precedes it.

This wedding of utopianism and apocalypticism can be seen in millenarian movements throughout history, from medieval sectarian revolts to such contemporary “cults” as Heaven’s

Gate (America), Aum Shinri Kyo (Japan), or the Great White Brotherhood (Russia). Yet millenarian and apocalyptic thought are not the exclusive property of religious believers; as we saw quite recently, people throughout the world awaited the year 2000 with both trepidation (the “millennium bug”) and anticipation (the expectation of a “New Age”).

Blackboard and the Internet. Blackboard is an important part of the course, facilitating announcements and the distribution of course materials.

Please keep in mind that, by default, Blackboard uses your NYU email account. Many of you may have other email accounts that you use. If so, it is a quite simple matter to arrange for your email from one account to be forwarded automatically to the other. I strongly urge you to do so. It is **your responsibility** to make sure that you are receiving official email sent to your NYU account.

Course requirements: No knowledge of any foreign language is expected, as all works will be read and discussed in English. It is essential that you keep up with the reading assignments and come to class prepared either to make observations or ask questions. Attendance is, of course, mandatory.

Class participation. Most class periods will be a mix of lecture and discussion; only occasionally will I spend the entire class giving a lecture. Everyone is encouraged to participate in discussion, which will be in-class exercises, and by the short papers (see below).

Writing Assignments: There will be three short analysis papers, a mid-semester paper (5-7 pages), and a final paper (8-10).

The *short analysis papers* may be no longer than *two* pages, and they can be about any of the works we are reading. These papers are a tool to help you think about an aspect of the text that interests you, and any ideas you generate in the course of these assignments would be welcome contributions to class discussion. You must turn in the short paper by the beginning of the last class during which the text is being discussed. That is, if you want to write a response to *Brave New World*, you must turn this paper either on November 8 or November 10. If we are only spending one class period on the work, then you must turn in the short paper at the beginning of that class. If you do turn in a short paper and don't show up for class, your grade for the assignment goes down by one letter. A letter is also dropped for each day the short paper is late.

You may not wait until December to turn in three short papers. The semester has been divided into three parts, and you must write one short paper by each of these three deadlines. That is, your first short paper must be turned in no later than **October 6** your second short paper is due no later than **November 8**, and the third short paper is due no later than **December 8**. Though you are not allowed to wait to do all the short papers until the end of the course, if you feel you would rather do your short papers earlier (turning two short papers during the first or second segments of the course), you are free to do so.

The topics of your *mid-semester paper* and *final paper* are yours to choose, but you must come talk to me about them in advance. It is hoped that the short papers will lead you toward topics for your longer papers. Both your mid-semester and your final papers can be based on short papers, as long as you are not tapping the same short paper for both longer works.

The mid-semester paper is due on **November 1** and the final paper must be turned on **December 15**.

I welcome full or partial drafts of any of these writing assignments. Drafts of the short papers must be shown to me no later than one week before the due date; drafts of the long papers must be submitted no later than two weeks before the due date.

Electronic submission of written assignments. You are welcome to submit hard copies of your short and long papers. However, I prefer to receive students' papers electronically. Blackboard has a "digital drop box" feature, but I have not found it to be particularly reliable. Therefore, please send me your assignments by email, as attachments. The preferred format is any version of Word (97 or above, any platform)--such documents usually take the ".doc" extension. Failing that, .rtf files (which can be generated by most word processing programs) are also fine. I can open most other formats as well, including Word Perfect (.wpd), but this requires some extra effort on my part. Please feel free to consult with me about file format questions.

When you submit a paper electronically, please give it a descriptive filename. I have dozens of students, and if all of you send me files called "Words Assignment" or "Gogol Paper," this will be confusing and frustrating. After the first time you make this mistake, I will not accept another paper with an unidentifiable file name.

The preferred (but not required) format for file names is <Student last name> <Type of assignment> <Assignment number> <Topic >. Examples: if Bonnie Tyler has written a second short paper on Dostoevsky the file should be something like "Tyler Short Paper 2 (Dostoevsky).doc". If Eric Roberts has written a midterm paper on Zamyatin then the file should be something like "Roberts Midterm (Zamyatin).doc". A final paper on LeGuin by Scott Baio would be "Baio Final (LeGuin.doc".

Finally, please note that I have multiple email accounts. Please do not send email to all accounts at once ("cc"); if you do, I will end up with three copies of your message. Any of the three accounts will do.

Final Grade. Your final grade will be determined as follows:

Class Participation	20%
Short papers:	30%
Mid-semester paper:	20%
Final paper:	30%

Class participation. Most class periods will be a mix of lecture and discussion; only occasionally will I spend the entire class giving a lecture. Everyone is encouraged to participate in discussion, which will be facilitated by questions that I will be distributing in advance over electronic mail, and by the short papers.

Active and constructive class participation can significantly improve your final grade. Frequent absences can have a negative effect on it.

Useful Reference Material:

For writing papers and citation formats (you may choose any citation format so long as you use it consistently):

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

** This site reproduces much of the information located in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

Turabian, Kate. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* . 7th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th ed.

Strunk, William & White, E.B. *The Elements of Style*. Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon, 2000)

Williams, Joseph. *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. 8th ed.

Editions: Many of these books come in different editions and different translations, and I understand that you might prefer to buy used copies of these editions to save money. Therefore I am including my recommendations/warnings about the various editions of each of these books.

At the NYU Bookstore:

*Bacon, Francis. *The New Atlantis*. White, Frederic R. *Famous Utopias of the Renaissance*. Putney, Vermont: Hendricks House, 1981.

Bellamy, Edward. *Looking Backward*. Feel free to use any edition.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from Underground* . Please use only this edition.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Herland*. Feel free to use any edition.

*Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. Any edition is fine.

*Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Dispossessed*. Any edition is fine.

*Moore, Alan and David Gibbons. *Watchmen*. Feel free to use any edition.

More, Thomas. *Utopia*. Please use only this edition

Orwell, George. *1984*. Feel free to use any edition.

Plato's *Republic*. There are a large number of translations and editions; I have chosen the G. M. A. Grube translation. If you choose an edition which does not conform to the

standard division of the book into ten chapters (such as the Cornford translation), you may have difficulty following along.

*Platonov, Andrei. *The Foundation Pit*. There are two translations of this book, and I have chosen the better of the two. Please use this translation.

**Zamyatin, Yevgeny. *We*. There are at least four translations of this novel, and several editions in print. However, Clarence Brown's recent translation is *much* better than all the others. Please use only this one.

*On reserve at Bobst.

**In the first-floor reference section.

On Blackboard:

Borges, Jorge Luis. "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"

Jameson, Frederic. *Archeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. New York: Verso, 2007. xi-xvi, 10-56.

Marin, Louis. "Disneyland: A Degenerate Utopia." Davis, Robert Con and Ronald Schleifer. *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*. Third Edition. New York: Longman, 1994. 283-295

Marx and Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. In Robert C. Tucker's *Marx-Engels Reader*. New York: Norton, 1972 331-362

Morson, Gary Saul. *On the Boundaries of Genre*. 69-146.
Revelation. .

CLASS SCHEDULE

September 6 (T) Introduction	
September 8 (Th) Plato's Republic (1) ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read Books 2-4 (see handout)	October 18 (T) Millenarianism and the Apocalypse ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read <i>Revelation</i>
September 13 (T) Plato's Republic (2) ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read Books 4, 5, 7 (see handout)	October 20 (T) Marx and Engels ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read <i>Communist Manifesto</i> (Packet)
September 15 (Th) More's Utopia ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read <i>Utopia</i> ⚙ Read Jameson (xi-xvi, 10-21)	October 25 (T) Bellamy (1) ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read Introduction to <i>Looking Backwards</i> ⚙ Read <i>Looking Backwards</i> (Chapters 1-11) ⚙ Read Morson (69-106)
September 20 (T) Campanella ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read <i>City of the Sun</i> ⚙ Read Jameson (22-41)	October 27 (T)h Bellamy (2) ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read <i>Looking Backwards</i> (finish) ⚙ Read Morson (107-146)
September 22 (Th) Bacon ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read <i>The New Atlantis</i> ⚙ Read Jameson (42-56)	November 1 (T) Zamyatin (1) ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read <i>We</i> (Records 1-18) Mid-semester Paper Due
September 27 (T) Disneyland? ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read Marin	November 3 (Th) Zamyatin (2) ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read <i>We</i> (finish)
September 29 (Th) NO CLASS-ROSH HASHANAH	November 8 (T) Huxley (1) ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read <i>Brave New World</i> (Part One) Final Deadline for Short Paper #2
October 4 (T) Dostoevsky ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read <i>Notes from Underground</i> (Part One)	November 10 (Th) Huxley (2) ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read <i>Brave New World</i> (finish)
October 4 (T) Dostoevsky ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read <i>Notes from Underground</i> (Finish) Final Deadline for First Short Paper	November 15 (T) Orwell (1) ⚙ Read <i>1984</i> (Part One)
October 11 (T) NO CLASS-FAKE HOLIDAY	November 17 (Th) Orwell (2)
October 13 (Th) Gilman ▼ For Today: ⚙ Read Gilman <i>Herland</i>	

▼ For Today:
⊕ Read *1984* (Finish)

November 22 (T) Borges
▼ For Today:
⊕ Read Borges, "Tlön"

November 24 (Th) THANKSGIVING
▼ For Today:
⊕ NO CLASS

November 29(T) Platonov (1)
▼ For Today:
⊕ Read *The Foundation Pit* (Part 1)

December 1 (Th) Platonov (2)
▼ For Today:
⊕ Read *The Foundation Pit* (finish)

December 6 (T) Le Guin (1)
▼ For Today:
⊕ Read *The Dispossessed* (Part 1)

December 8 (Th) Leguin (2)
▼ For Today:
⊕ Read *The Dispossessed* (finish)
**Final Deadline for Short
Paper#3**

December 13 (T) Moore/Gibbons (1)
▼ For Today:
⊕ Read *Watchmen* (Chapters 1-5)

December 15 (Th) Moore/Gibbons (2)
▼ For Today:
⊕ Read *Watchmen* (finish)
FINAL PAPER DUE